

**Handout 4-4: Seattle Times Article – December 16, 2009****Dam discharge that swamped Pacific spurs finger-pointing****By [Susan Kelleher](#) and [Warren Cornwall](#)***Seattle Times staff reporters*

Floodwaters that pushed through the city of Pacific last week could have been controlled 11 hours earlier if word had reached the federal agency that was releasing a torrent of water upstream at Mud Mountain Dam.

The Army Corps of Engineers said Tuesday it had no clue it was flooding two of the city's subdivisions. Still, once it learned the extent of the flooding, it took two more hours before there was an order to slow the release of water at the dam.

Who was responsible for alerting the corps — or whether the agency should have known better — has provoked finger-pointing among city and King County emergency officials. Fundamental questions also have been raised about the chain of command for disaster response and communication in King County.

"We need to find out what happened and why," corps spokeswoman Andrea Takash said. "It's important because floods are going to happen again. It's going to rain, and this is the Northwest."

On Tuesday night, residents of Pacific — a city of 6,000 in South King County — still were pumping water from their basements, and demanding answers.

"No warning. No warning. That is really what is under our anger," said Carol Ann McMullen, one of about 300 residents who joined a standing-room-only crowd to address officials at Alpac Elementary School.

Pacific's mayor says he called King County's Emergency Coordination Center at about 10 p.m. Thursday to report that floodwaters from the White River were rising rapidly.

Jeff Bowers, assistant director of King County's Office of Emergency Management, said he relayed the mayor's concerns that night in a call to the corps. But the corps said it has no record of such a call.

Bowers said his agency at that point had no obligation or responsibility to follow up. Bowers said it was the city's job to deal with the corps.

On Tuesday, Pacific Mayor Rich Hildreth, outfitted in an inflatable vest and rubber boots, stalked the eroded banks of the White River, blaming King County for failing to help stop what even at the time seemed to be an obvious source of the flooding — Mud Mountain Dam.

The drama began Thursday when the county informed Hildreth that the corps had begun to release water from its nearly full reservoir so that it would not overflow and put the earthen dam at risk.

At its peak, the corps expected to release 11,700 cubic feet per second down the White River. The same amount was released in 2006 and caused only "nuisance" flooding in the city's park.

**Water over levee**

By about 5:20 p.m., the mayor called the county's flood-warning center to report that river water was pouring over the levee at the park. By about 7:30 p.m., he activated the city's emergency-response system, and by about 10 that night, he called the county's Emergency Coordination Center to report that the flooding had expanded beyond the park.

Two roads had water on them, the mayor reported, and the fast-moving river was branching into White River Estates, a newer development of about 80 homes near the river.

Bowers, the county's assistant director of Emergency Management, said the coordination center's only responsibility at that point was to convey the information to the corps and the county's flood-warning center, and to offer Pacific resources such as sandbags and personnel to help manage the water.

Bowers said he called a phone number in the 360 area code that a corps liaison had provided his office earlier in the day. Bowers initially said he wasn't sure whether he reached a human being or left a message. But later, on Tuesday, he said: "I'm positive I talked to somebody."

The Seattle Times repeatedly called the number that Bowers says he called but never received an answer. Takash, the corps spokeswoman, said she could not locate the number on any corps phone list, including home, office or cellphones.

Bowers said someone at the corps returned his call, but he could not say for certain who that was. Bowers said he was tied up with other more pressing matters Thursday night and did not make note of whom he talked to and when.

Bowers said he told the corps that the mayor wanted to speak to them. He said he could not remember whether he gave the mayor's number to the corps, or the corps' number to the mayor.

Bowers said his coordination center spoke with city representatives "several times" throughout the night and into the morning.

"All we can do is coordinate information flow," Bowers said.

The mayor said he did not talk to anyone from the corps and was not given a number to call them. He said he believed it was the county's responsibility to do so and was not told otherwise.

**Congressman enlisted**

Hildreth said he eventually enlisted help from U.S. Rep. Adam Smith's staff and asked them to get in touch with the corps to slow the release from the dam.

The corps says it first learned of flooding in Pacific when a call came into the Seattle district's emergency-operations center at about 6:15 a.m. Friday. A flood engineer drove

to the city at about 7 a.m., observed flooding at the park and offered to provide the mayor with more sandbags at around 8 a.m., corps spokeswoman Takash said.

The decision to ease the flow from the dam didn't come until Col. Anthony Wright, head of the corps' Seattle district, flew over Pacific in a helicopter about 9 a.m.

"The aerial view was key," Takash said.

When Wright saw the flooding, he ordered the helicopter to land, called the dam's operators, and told them to ramp it back. They cut the flow shortly after.

"We did not receive anything to alert us that this was anything beyond what we were expecting," said Carolyn Fitzgerald, chief of the corps' Water Management Section in Seattle, which oversees Mud Mountain Dam operations. "I think we still need to talk to other parties to find out exactly where that information was."

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